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**USERS' COMMODIFICATION  
OF XYZ LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICES**

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**Abstract**

The phenomenon of digitizing reference services in the XYZ Library has been going on for more than a decade beginning in the early 2000s. The existence of information and communication technology in the digital era implemented in XYZ Library has broken down the limits of distance and time of library services. The remote access feature facilitated by the XYZ Library makes it easy for the librarians and library users to communicate. The focus of this research is on how the transformation of reference services from conventional or manual to digital reshapes the complexity of human and technological relationships, power relations between librarians and library users, as well as among librarians themselves, in the frame of political economic studies by Vincent Mosco (2009). This research was conducted by using descriptive qualitative approach, and case study method. Data are collected by interview and via email. Informants in this study were reference librarians, Doctorate students, and professors. Within the framework of Mosco's political economy theory, commodification, spatialization, and structural practices also occur in the activities of XYZ Library governance. The commodification of library users and individuals involved in the XYZ Library program is a form of implementation of Mosco's commodities. While the commodification of XYZ Library websites is a form of practice on the media commodification in Mosco's political economy theory. The practice of commodification of audiences and media in XYZ Library is the capital that managers use to improve services to the users as well as to show the performance of library manager to the University managers.

**Keywords:**

Reference services, library transformation, commodification, Vincent Mosco's political economy

**Introduction**

The development of science accompanied by advances in the field of information and communication technology has led to a very significant change in the world of libraries and librarianship. Reference services is one of the library

services affected by the change. In several decades, reference service transforms as technology grows and followed by the higher expectation of library users. The development and changing needs and expectations of library users have created a new atmosphere within the scope of library services and demanded libraries to respond appropriately with flexibility. Various responses are generated by the library to face these challenges. The most perceived changes in the university library, because the needs and requests for information of lecturers, students, and researchers are more complex. This of course makes the library must use various approaches to fulfil their needs. The transformation of the digital reference service is a process of adaptation to the development of technology and society. Almost all information is presented in digital format. However, this change is not something that is taken for granted. This change is not only a problem for the user but also for librarians. The main parameter of the success of this service is its usefulness for the user.

In fact, transformation does not change the main purpose of reference services. Only the modes of service change, such as how librarians serve, interact, and answer reference questions. The concept of 24/7 reference services enables the users to take advantage of this service according to their time. More than a decade XYZ Library has implemented information technology in its library services, including reference services. The reference service aims to assist XYZ graduate students, especially those who are working on the final project or research, to obtain literature or information. The availability of digital services makes it easier for users to have access to information resources. Searches can be done anytime and anywhere via the link <http://lib.XYZ.ac.id/opac/XYZ/>. Librarians serve users via online facilities such as email, chat, facebook and twitter. So the library users can ask a question or contact the librarian through [refdesk.lib@XYZ.ac.id](mailto:refdesk.lib@XYZ.ac.id) email address, [facebook.com/blank-universitas-xyz](https://www.facebook.com/blank-universitas-xyz) account, twitter with account @ XYZ-library, also via chat with [chatref.XYZ.ac](https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/00299XXXXXX) account .id.

Reference Librarian served as an intermediary between library collections and users. The digitization or transformation of collections from print to digital is an additional burden for reference librarians, as the information search request can come anytime and from anywhere. Moreover, the performance evaluation is based on statistics that rely on the quantity of visitors visiting the library. While the key success of reference services depends on the number of articles found and their relevance to the information needs of the user. However, digitalization also gives the librarian the ability to communicate with the user, especially with the professors. The figure of the Highest Rank of Lecturer, who in communication or face-to-face service, is considered 'gods' characterized by a well-respected, even dreaded, respected, should be served, in a cyber space it is not found hierarchical relation between librarians and professors. Communication is more fluid in the cyber space. In fact, librarians can also accommodate the user for his personal interests. The friendships embodied in the activities of librarians and users, developed far into friendship in social media. This is the practice of human

relationships formed by the existence of technology. It was concluded that the adaptation of communication and information technology in the library was legible but also to free the librarians in relation to the user.

The mastery of technology in the digitization of reference services cannot be separated from the cultural context of librarians and users who shape their behavior in technology. The basic assumption is that the behavior in technology cannot be separated from the sociocultural context of the user. This reference service transformation research will be framed by Vincent Mosco's political economy theory that examines the viability of actors in the digital age. In general, political economy is the study of control and survival in social life. Control refers to how society organizes itself, manages affairs and experiences success or failure to adapt to the changes they face. Control is a political process because it forms relationships in society, and survival is an economic problem because it involves the process of production and reproduction. Three concepts in Vincent Mosco's political economy theory (2009) are commodification, spatialization and structure.

This study attempts to uncover the complexity of human and technological relationships at the XYZ Library reference service through the perspective of cultural and media studies. The problems of human and technological relationships in library services generally and in particular reference services which has never become the domain of research. The objective of the study is to find the commodification of the users in digitizing or transforming the reference service.

### **Transformation of Information Resources**

The development of information technology in the last two decades, especially the growth of the internet has a direct impact on the change of reference services in the library. At the beginning of the emergence of digital reference services available only by electronic mail or e-mail. In 1996, the first program of e-mail reference service system was developed by Eric Lease Morgan, known as the 'See You See a Librarian' project (Zanin-Yost, 2004: 6). The development of information and communication technology is greatly affect the behavior of users in searching information or utilizing services and facilities in the library. The librarian is required to adapt as stated by informants AM and GC. They argue that there are logical consequences whereby the users adapt to face existing realities because surviving with printed collections or printed resources will not solve their need for literature.

On the other hand, librarians as information providers also experience a transformation in addressing the development of information and communication technology. According to informant G, the development of information and communication technology has an impact on the reference service, where G assumes that the user can be independent in searching for information via cyberspace. The same statement is expressed by informants A and D. G, A and D argue that the development of information and communication technology makes

it easy for users in searching information, so that they do not need the help of librarians anymore. This is evident from the low visits to reference services. The quote indicates that librarians still see physical or face-to-face statistics are still indicators of the success of reference services. Spatialization in the Mosco concept that information and communication technology is a medium to overcome geographical space constraints, has not been interpreted by some librarians. Digitalization of collections that facilitate access and overcome geographical restrictions did not change the views of some librarians in understanding human relationships with technology. This means that humans are not fully influenced by technology.

Responses are somewhat different from informant B about the development of information and communication technology. For B the development of information and communication technology precisely requires librarians to adapt and change the services provided to the user. Utilization of information and communication technology by library users will depend on the librarian. B assumes that humans can be influenced by technology. Technology makes it easy for humans to engage in social interaction between them. Humans can accommodate technology as a tool in library management. Librarians use technology in reference services as a search tool and as a communication medium that replaces face-to-face meetings into virtual. Informant ZO, MS, AP, GC, WU, and FR say that they have difficulty in tracking the literature. They also recognize that librarians are more competent in finding information compared to the users. The speed and accuracy of finding information is the domain of librarians. In addition, time, access difficulties and facilities that are not satisfactory causes user still need the help of librarians. Mastery in tracing information is a skill of librarians recognized by users.

One of the impacts of the development of information and communication technology in the library is the emergence of e-resources trends, both in the form of online journals, e-books, e-videos, and electronic library-based applications. XYZ Library subscribe to a number of online journals and e-books that can be used by academic community to support lectures, teaching, and research. Access to e-resources can be done from within and outside the XYZ Library network. The availability of e-resources is certainly very helpful in searching the literature needed. The library users rely heavily on e-resources as a reference in the writing of scientific papers, but for various reasons they still require the help of librarians to search information they need. Like IA, ZO, MS and GC who claim that they find many electronic or digital sources but sometimes they do not find the information that suits their needs. They can only find the information they need after they have the librarian's help.

AM, CW and RF, library users believe that the online journal that XYZ Library subscribes is more up-to-date, complete, and more practical in accessing it. The updating, completeness, and practicality of accessing e-resources including online journals reconstructs the way in which users perceive the way they obtain information. Significant increase in access number indicates the digital

information resource usage not only by users but the XYZ University community. Higher usage can eventually become a capital for Library managers to demonstrate their success in providing information and literature services to XYZ University.

In Vincent Mosco's theory, the users become the target of commodity audiences for the manager to increase the subscription budget of various e-resources because of the high access by the user is key performance indicator of budget allocation. The wide range of e-resources information resources also overcomes geographic space constraints as well as time spaces in the technological era. Spatialization within this framework means the convenience for the user to access information without visiting the library, as well as the remote access library facility. Likewise, librarians A, B, C and E who consider that the trend of e-resources is inevitable as a result of the development of information and communication technology. This is the spatialization in Mosco's view that overcomes space and time constraints. Through spatialization, the latest information is also easy for readers to access.

Changes in the form of collections from printed to electronics as a result of the development of information and communication technology inevitably must be addressed by librarians by utilizing access to e-resources services. Librarians also apply the procurement process of information resources based on the needs of the users. The procurement of digital or electronic collections is done through a gradual process, starting from studying the information needs of the visitors, the suitability of the curriculum of the study program, and the recommendations of the teachers, even the professors. This is done so that digital information resources subscribed to be utilized maximally. Professor of Targeted Electronic Delivery Services (EDS) is a member of the Board of Trustees of XYZ University (MWA XYZ).

The Head of Library as a manager uses a group of professors as a means to promote the collection of digital information resources to the teachers and students. This is an information distribution strategy so that digital information resources are widely accessed by the scientific community of XYZ University. The professors are small target compared to graduate students. But it has a great impact on influencing lecturers and students. The position of professors in MWA XYZ becomes a tool for library managers to press the Rectorate to increase subscription budget of digital information resources. Because EDS service with the professor as target is actually small but the impact on teachers and students is quite large.

The XYZ University Publication is at the top rank compared to other universities in Indonesia. Based on the results of QS University Ranking 2017 annual publication, XYZ University has maintained its position to become the best university in Indonesia for 6 consecutive years and ranked 277th in the world. This is also supported by data on electronic subscription from 2014 to 2016 which increase from 34 titles to 44 titles. Access to electronic journals subscribed by XYZ Library also increased significantly from 2014-2017, from 3,250,945 to

4,297,752. The above improvement data is very important for library managers to gain recognition from the rectorate of the success of XYZ Library in utilizing its information resources. Users are used as commodities to continue to improve their services. The need for high literature can be the manager's capital to increase the subscription of digital information resources.

According to the theory of social dominance, as Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (1999) have pointed out, humans have a special tendency to create hierarchies or levels in society. Every member of society has a different position in the hierarchy. Hierarchies can be based on social groups or individual characteristics. Social dominance theory explains that in social groups always formed hierarchical structure or social level. This shows the existence of a number of social groups having different positions, ie social groups or individuals who are at the top of the hierarchy (dominant) as well as social groups or individuals who are at the bottom of the hierarchy (subordinate). Social groups or dominant individuals are depicted with positive values they have or based on material or symbolic things. Dominant groups or individuals usually have political power or authority, have good resources and many, have a wealth or high social status. This is in contrast to social groups or subordinate individuals, groups or individuals with low social status and power.

The Internet became the main tools of informants to search the literature. Source on the internet is too rich, but it is precisely in the internet that the user needs the advanced skill of searching the qualified information, so as not to get caught in the unnecessary link. The reader also needs to understand how to evaluate the source of information obtained from the internet, including accuracy, objectivity, and authority. One of the most popular tools inherent in the minds of Internet users today is 'Google'. 'Google Scholar' is one of the sites that the informants often use when searching for information on the internet. 'Google Scholar' is one of the alternatives that librarians can use to search for scientific information or references by publication format. Such references may be scientific journals or research results that are scientifically accountable. 'Google Scholar' became one of the open source used by informants. In addition, informants also rely on fellow community of researchers and libraries outside XYZ University.

Google Scholar in Mosco spatialization concept is a virtual space, in the sense of space without place. Virtual space or virtual space is a space that does not require a physical place. Virtual space bridges people with information through media technology. But without skills in exploring the virtual world, then this technology media is not useful for the user. Therefore some of the informants keep selecting electronic journals that XYZ Library subscribed as a source of reading and reference. XYZ Library undergoes a collection transformation according to technological developments. This can be seen from the extreme budget changes in the collection procurement. In the era of 1990, the collection of XYZ Library is still dominated by printed form. Even if there is non-book collection, still limited to cassette, CD, and micro film. Online database was subscribed around the year 2001 or the end of year 2000. This along with start of

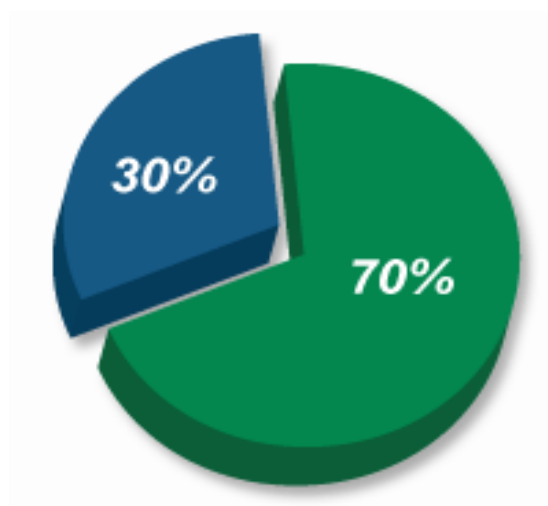


the entry of vendor of online journal provider to Indonesia. Formerly, access to online database could be done in two ways, namely through the internet and through CD-ROM. But according to librarian K, access through the internet was still very limited. This is related to the availability of bandwidth and network XYZ in the early 2000s.

Along with technological developments and university demands to become a 'World Class Research University', budget allocations for library collection procurement have also increased significantly. XYZ Library began to add the online databases subscribed, according to the demands of the study program. Since 2005, e-resources subscriptions have increased significantly. Many new online databases are subscribed. By 2017, XYZ Library subscribes 37 online databases covering many disciplines, as well as research tools. From the budget side, there is a very sharp increase from 2011 to 2017. The development of information and communication technology gives impact to the way people communicate. At the reference service in XYZ Library, direct face-to-face services are already transformed into digital reference services. The reader does not need to come to the library to get the librarian's help in meeting the information needs. Various virtual or digital reference services that are represented in various forms are made for the convenience of the user.

The digital-based reference service mode arises from the transformation of information resources into digital form. The large collection of XYZ Library digital libraries accessed by readers with all sorts of consequences, makes library managers aware that library reference service methods should also be transformed. Mosco's concept of commodification and spatialization in the reference service arena was playing as well. The collection transformation to overcome geographical and time constraints is a process of spatialisation in reference services. The user who becomes the managing capital to increase the subscription of the digital information resources is used as the commodification tool, in this case the commodity of the audience by the manager. The number of users accessing electronic information sources is required by the manager in recognition of the information resources.

In terms of number of budgets and number of collections, the XYZ Library collection comparisons between printed collections and e-resources are as follows:



**Printed: (30%)**

- Books (textbooks and references)
- Final Project
- Innaugural Speech
- Magazines and journals
- Newspapers
- Manuscripts

**Elektronik: (70%)**

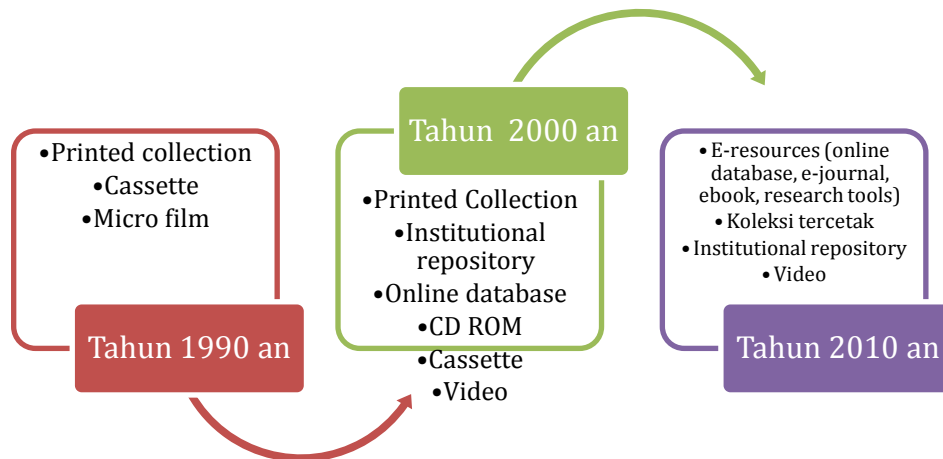
- CD, CD ROM
- Video
- Digital File
- Online databases
- Ebooks

*Figure 1. Percentage of printed and electronic collections of XYZ Library*

The above comparison explains that the transformation of collections occurring in the XYZ Library is significant. Seventy percent of the collection is now in the form of e-resources. This certainly affects the applied service mode as well as the



required librarian competence. The collection transformation phase that takes place in XYZ Library can be explained simply as follows:



*Figure 2. The transformation phase of XYZ Library collection*

### **Commodification In Transformation of Reference Services**

Information resources are an important element in the provision of reference services. The tremendous growth of electronic information and technological developments led to the decrease use printed collections (K and H user informants). The fact that the development of information technology and the internet that facilitate the search of literature would be a challenge for librarians XYZ Library (informant RP and MA). The visible view of the RP and MA citations as reference librarians justifies the low utilization of printed collections is currently reinforced by the magnitude of the influence of information technology that provides the ease of providing digital collections and the existence of the internet that facilitate users browse information freely from various tools provided by the library.

According to the librarian the low utilization of printed reference sources that occur today in XYZ Library is a natural change. One of the consequences of migrating libraries on the availability of digital collections in meeting digital library information needs is the increasingly neglected printed collections. Increased utilization of electronic information resources (70%) shows a strong relationship between the user and the application of information and communication technology in XYZ Library. Ease of access that is not limited space and time and the availability of digital information resources is the capital for the user in completing their tasks. This is represented in a publication

produced by XYZ University's society, which in 2017 successfully maintained its position of being the best university in Indonesia even rising to the 277th position of the world based on QS World University Rankings.

Increased use of e-resources such as downloaded journal articles, access e-books, research tools and online video is significant from 2014 to 2017, from 3,250,945 to 4,297,752. It seems that this ease of access is utilized rightly by the XYZ University community. While access to reference services via email [refdesk.lib@XYZ.ac.id](mailto:refdesk.lib@XYZ.ac.id) and [eds.lib@XYZ.ac.id](mailto:eds.lib@XYZ.ac.id) based on complete statistics there are only the year 2016 as much as 670, and data of 2017 as many as 627. (According to one informant, this data is unfinished). E-resources is a capital or commodity for Library managers in conducting services to the XYZ University community primarily for active users. This digital-based information resource, as described above, is widely used by users in its academic activities to produce publications which is one of the benchmarks of university rankings. XYZ University with its ambition to become 'World Research Class University' is very concerned about this condition. Library Managers recognize that digital information resources accessible by many users are the support of publication ratings produced by the scientific community of XYZ University. Like the statements of the users that they prefer digital collections because of the ease of its access. Therefore, managers strive to continue to increase the quantity of digital information resources. It is in this context that librarians are commodified by Library managers in increasing budgets to subscribe to digital information resources.

As stated by Vincent Mosco (2009), the commodification of audiences is a process of reader commodification by media companies and advertisers from the initial function as a media consumer to simultaneously the consumer of other products. Increased access of e-resources by library users become the capital of the manager of the Library as an important indicator of the disposal of information resources subscribed. The strength of a library lies in the quantity and quality of the information resources that are collected. The collection of libraries by library XYZ libraries shows the success of managers in the procurement of information resources and budget absorption. The existence of users as the access of information resources utilized by library managers to increase budget procurement of information resources. It appears that from year to year there is an increase in subscription fees for journals and electronic databases.

The subscription budget of electronic resources from 2012 to 2016 has doubled. The commodity reference library used in the XYZ Library is the impact of the transformation of information resource formats from printed to electronic and even digital. This transformation goes hand in hand with the development of information and communication technology. The printed information resources require the reader to come to the library, whether to read or borrow a collection. The initial reference service is a direct face-to-face service between library users and librarians transformed through modes of communication technology such as short message service, e-mail, and whatsapp. Through these modes geographical

constraints can be overcome. Mosco's spatialization can address the needs of millennia in the XYZ Library.

Library users with their different backgrounds are helped by the application of this spatialization concept. As a lecturer, professors and post-graduate students need access speed and ease to obtain information and literature that suits their needs. Limitations of time and distance that become barriers for the users to visit the library and also time to do the task as a student, who usually do their assignment in their spare time, usually at night, is highly mediated by the application of communication technology in XYZ Library. The commodification of users and the spatialisation of reference services in the transformation of reference services are interrelated to one another, like two sides of a coin. Both occur together. The increasing number of electronic journals and digital databases that meet the needs of the XYZ University community will increase access to these journals and databases. Increased access by users can be utilized by XYZ Library managers to improve the quantity and quality of e-resources.

The Head of Library is also shrewd in playing his role as an individual by using the XYZ Library as a stage of various activities to enhance his existence. The XYZ library as a place or space is used to facilitate activities that are not necessarily related to library functions. Library is used as a place to share information and knowledge. For example the exhibition and sales activities of agate, and staging *pencak silat*, among others. People who are invited or who 'offer themselves' as resource persons serve as commodities by the head of the library. This is interpreted by the head of the Library to commodify these people as a tool for self-existence to the university authorities. All these interests will ultimately increase the attention of university authorities to the development of XYZ Library. Library activities also become a capital for the head of the library to foster wider relationships with high-ranking officials or policy makers in both XYZ and wider circles. Clearly, as the head of XYZ Library has the dominant power relations in playing the role of library by conducting various programs and activities either involving the head of library as a resource or not.

XYZ Library Website that can be accessed either from inside or from outside campus through remote access is a commodity for library manager to reach library users. Display website is designed to facilitate the user in knowing the existence of XYZ Library and also access the collection or known by the jargon user's friendly. The practice of media commodification by using the XYZ Library website has been implemented by library managers in addition to commodification of the users and the program of activities held. From the above description, the practice of commodification of audiences and the commodification of media according to Vincent Mosco, has been done by the XYZ library manager. The interest on behalf of the XYZ Library's progress as well as the 'personal' interests of the library chief became the basis of commodification practice was constructed.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of political economy theory in the management of libraries, especially reference services, seeks to understand political realities and other forms of social attitudes, based on individual actors or agents who always strive to achieve their interests. A reference service which is one aspect of library activities can be a Mosco's political economy battle arena. The idea that emerged from this research is a reference service that basically providing non-profit services to the library users can be a real review of political economy involving the interests of the agents. Mosco's concept can be implemented as a library study. Because the service is also a medium of communication between users and libraries. Commodification is the process of transforming valuable goods and services into worth selling goods and services. The transformation process from value to sale in the library, always involves library managers, audiences who use libraries, librarians, and decision makers, each of whom has an interest. Referring to Mosco's theory, in this study users as an audience can be the most product of commodity. The users is a tool to attract the attention of the university authorities against the library.

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